

1578/318
*The Miraculous Success of the Gospel in its first preaching
a good proof of its Divine Origin and Authority.*

A
S E R M O N

PREACHED in the

P A R I S H C H U R C H

O F

St. *M A R G A R E T*, *Westminster*,

On T R I N I T Y - S U N D A Y, 1725.

A T A N

O R D I N A T I O N

H E L D T H E R E

By the Right Reverend Father in G O D

S A M U E L

Lord Bishop of *Rocheſter*.

By *J O H N D E N N E*, M. A.

Vicar of St. *Leonard* in *Shoreditch*, and Chaplain to
his L O R D S H I P.

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THE

SERMON

PARRISH CHURCH

ON THE

HELD THE

By the Right Reverend Father in God

WILLIAM

Lord Bishop of Rochester

BY JOHN DENNIS, M. A.

Verger of the Cathedral in London, and Chaplain to

his Lordship

Printed by his Lordship's Order

LONDON:

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P R E F A C E.



THE following Sermon was first preached to my Parish on the Sunday before the festival of the Epiphany, being on a subject the most proper I could think of to give my People just notions of the manifestation of the Gospel to the Gentiles : and to convince them, that the wonderful success it met with was a good proof of its divine origin and authority. I was afterwards appointed to preach at a Public Ordination, and having not time enough to compose a new discourse, I did believe, that a few alterations might make this very suitable to that solemn occasion. It was then so much approved of by the Bishop and the Clergy who were present, that I determined with my self upon their

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judgment of its value to cast this my mite into that noble Treasury of learning and reasoning, which has of late been opened in defense of our Christian Faith.

ALL the Arguments that can be drawn from the Prophecies of the Old Testament, or from the Miracles recorded in the New, have been lately put together with extraordinary exactness, and urged in their full force by a most learned Prelate of our Church, and other able Writers ; who have demonstrated, that all the characters, types or figures, whereby Moses and the Prophets described the promised Messiah, were applicable to, and wonderfully accomplished in the person of Jesus ; who also ^a doing works which none other man ever did, or ^b can do, except God^c be with him, proved himself to be the Christ, and a teacher come from God : and consequently, the Christian Revelation must be divine.

MY design in this discourse is to carry these arguments somewhat farther, and to shew a posteriori, that the amazing progress of the gospel through the world cannot be accounted for by other means, than the power of truth, and the charms of virtue enforced upon the consciences of Men by the influences of the Holy Ghost, by Miracles, and by the hopes of heavenly glory. For since there was wanting in Jesus no one circumstance,

^a Joh. xv. 24.

^b iii. 2.

mark

mark or character appropriated by any of the Prophets to the promised Messiah; since there appeared no fraud, or suspicion of juggling in his Miracles; and since his doctrine is really good and excellent; God's bare permitting it to encrease and flourish in the same manner he himself had predicted, and at a time when it was least likely to do so, is to me a convincing evidence, that the Christian Religion can be no imposture.

BESIDES, *since all the weapons of worldly warfare, wealth, power, learning and eloquence pointed with the keenest wit and malice, could not get the mastery over a few poor, weak, unlearned and simple men, or suppress their Doctrine; may we not rationally conclude with Gamaliel, that it was of God, and therefore they could not overthrow it? for if this counsel or this work had been of Man, it would have come to nought^c; any imposture must have been detected in that inquisitive and knowing age, or else it would have been blasted by God. In vain therefore do the indefatigable Patrons of infidelity at this distance of time search after faults or forgeries in the Christian Revelation, unless their Invention be more shrewd than that of those, who have gone before them in as violent an opposition to the Gospel, as they themselves can make. Surely they understand not what they read in the Prophet Esaias,*
^d *No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper;*

^c Acts v. 38, 39.

^d Isaiah liv. 17.

and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment, thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD. ^e CHRIST hath built his Church upon a rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

I HAVE cited in the manner of Notes several passages out of Authors of the best learning and judgment, whereby the Reader will see, what stress the Advocates of our Religion have always laid upon the miraculous Propagation of it through the world. If I have placed this argument in so good a light, and urged it with such force, as to remove the least scandal from Christianity, to strengthen one person in his faith, or make one better in his life, my pains will be well bestowed, and I shall have a better reason for publishing this Sermon, than what appears in the Title-page; though that is always of great weight with me.

^e Mat. xvi. 18.



MARK IV. 30, 31, 32, Verses.

30. *And he said, whereunto shall we liken the Kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?*
31. *It is like a grain of Mustard-seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth.*
32. *But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches, so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.*



OUR Saviour in this Chapter delivers *the mystery of the kingdom of God* in a great variety of *Parables*. The *Kingdom of God* is an expression very common in the writings of the Evangelists, and known to signify the state of the gospel, or the christian religion: and *Mystery* must here mean those truths and circumstances of it, which had been hitherto hidden and concealed, and were yet to come. *Parables* are no other than fit likenesses, and lively comparisons taken from the objects of our senses, but figuring to us other things, as they really are or will be.

SUCH is the *Parable* of my text, and tho' it might not at the time of speaking be clearly and fully understood without expounding, being then a *Mystery*: yet since the event prefigured by it is come to pass, every one must see, that in the growth and flourishing of the *mustard-seed* the rise and progress of the Christian religion was

was foretold. For as *a grain of mustard-seed, when it is sown in the Earth, is the least of all seeds*, for thus it was in the climate of *Judæa*, even to a proverb: so was Christianity at its first appearance little, and inconsiderable, received only by a few, and those mean persons. But when this *grain of mustard-seed is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, shooting out great branches, so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it*^a: so it was in fact with the doctrine of the gospel; which, tho' at first despised and lightly esteemed of by the *Jews*, soon spread over all the earth, it took root and flourished among all the nations of the *Gentiles*, and became the wonder and the religion of the World.

WHAT *Parable* therefore, *likeness* or *comparison* could our Saviour chuse, so fit as this of *the grain of mustard-seed, whereunto to liken or compare the kingdom of God* in this particular respect? There cannot be written or imagined any description at this day, which will be a more exact and lively picture of the rise and progress of the gospel. This therefore must be the *mystery of the Parable*, and we cannot more justly and properly apply it, than to this great and surprizing event, as the true end and accomplishment of it; and which our Saviour could not but have in his view, whilst he foresaw and foretold to his Disciples the future state and circumstances of his religion in the world.

MY Text then, thus taken and applyed, is a clear prophecy of the success and flourishing of christianity in the world, and will naturally lead me to enquire,

I. WHAT causes may be assigned equal to an effect so strange and universal, being very little and despicable in its beginnings.

^a Matt. xiii. 31. Luke xiii. 19.

II. How far this success may be urged as an argument of its truth, and a good proof of its divine origin and authority.

I. FIRST, I am to enquire, what causes may be assigned equal to an effect so strange and universal, as the success and flourishing of Christianity. And to judge aright upon this enquiry, we must quite change the present scene of things, search the records of ages past, and draw the picture of those times, wherein the Gospel took its rise, and made its progress. We must strip it of every advantage it may enjoy from education and establishment, and we must cancel every obligation of honour and obedience to the person of our Lord. We must shake off all the affection and love we have for our Redeemer; nay, we must arraign and condemn him in our thoughts, as an impostor and usurper. That good zeal and reverence we ought to shew *for the faith, which was once delivered to the Saints*, and attested by their blood, must be changed into prejudice, hatred and opposition, far beyond what a christian breast ought to conceive against the revilings of an infidel or apostate. We must look upon its Author in the very same light, in which he appeared unto the world about 1700 years ago, as the reputed ^b *son of a carpenter*, by a virgin of as mean a parentage, born in a stable, supposed to *come out of Nazareth*, a city grown contemptible to a Proverb; and yet claiming the ^c hereditary honours of *David's* family, nay, a right to be his *Lord*, the Messiah, and the *Son of the living God*.

MIRACLES, it is true, supported these extraordinary pretensions, but then they gained him no other retinue, than a few, poor, unlearned, simple men; for the

^a Matt. xiii. 55. Luk. ii. 7. Joh. i. 45.

B

^c Matt. xxii. 42. xvi. 16, 17.
interest,

interest, authority and reputation of the *Jewish* Rulers were all against him. ^d *Have any of the Rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him?* was thought an argument of greater weight, than his preaching or his miracles. And these *Rulers, Pharisees*, and the *Priests* prevailed so far, as in a legal way to execute him on the cross for a false prophet, and a seducer of the people, and with a shew of justice too, for they *sat in Moses seat*, and pretended to judge by *Moses* law.

AND had these things been so, the faction doubtless must have expired with him; for it is scarce possible to imagine, that those Apostles, who had just before denied and deserted an accused Master, should return to own a crucified one, when such a profession was sure to expose them to infamy, sufferings and death.

BESIDES, the Doctrine they had in commission to preach was new and singular; objections, of which it is easy to know the force, if human nature be still the same. The *Jews* were to resign the darling privilege of being a *peculiar people*, and to give up the law of *Moses*, with all hopes of a temporal *Messiah*: and the *Pharisees* were to disclaim those traditions, on which their whole esteem and wealth were built. The *Gentiles* were to plead guilty to the charge of abominable idolatries, and every nation was to renounce a scheme of religion, that had been settled by public law, revered for its antiquity, and woven into the civil constitution; and which we may suppose every honest person thro' the prejudice of education believed true. And of all prejudices from education, none is so obstinate and hard to be removed, as that of religion, which being planted in our tender years carries a lasting and sacred reverence along with it, so that not to waver be-

^d Joh. vii. 48.

comes a point of conscience and a religious duty^e.

HOWEVER, the Gospel might in time prevail by its truth and purity on minds disposed to think and reason, and willing to *prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good* in faith or practice. But how few were of this number? And would not these good qualities of truth and purity have stopped its progress thro' a world over-run with every sort of sin, which sprung from corrupted nature, and under the kindly influence of ignorance and superstition, had been growing for ages past into fixed habits? What difficulty must it be to struggle with, and master all the lusts, appetites and vices of human nature? and by what force could the Gospel change the bias, that interest, honour and custom had given to them? How hard a task must it have been to root these out, and in their stead to sow the seeds of vertue, and bring them to perfection in so bad a soil? Might not the *Ethiopian* as soon *change his skin, or the Leopard his spots*, as men in this condition become wise and good?

As for the Ministers of the Gospel chosen by our Saviour to bring about so difficult an enterprise, they were no other than twelve simple Men, and of a despised nation; remarkable for nothing but their meanness and their poverty, without languages, learning, sagacity or interest, without any studied ornaments of speech, or fine arts of persuasion, timorous to a fault, and for a while even diffident of their Master's promises, for all

^e Grotius sets this Difficulty in a true Light. Qui Christianismum, Apostolis docentibus, receperunt, animum non habebant à certâ normâ Religionis vacuum, ac proinde ductilem, ut qui *Paganica* sacra, & *Mahometis* legem primi susceperunt; sed contra, impletum opinionibus & consuetudine, quæ velut altera natura est, repugnante cum istis novis institutis, educati scilicet, legumq; & parentum auctoritate confirmati in sacris *Paganicis*, aut *Judaicis* ritibus. Grotius de *Ver. Christianæ Relig.* Lib. II. cap. 22.

forsook him and fled, when Judas had betray'd him unto death. And yet we see eleven of them soon after his crucifixion going forth to preach before Kings and Princes, to dispute with the wise, and ^f *to teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*. And in so surprising a manner was their preaching carried on, that to speak in the language of St. John, we may resemble them to an *Angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people* g.

BUT of their success let their Enemies inform us, who make it matter of wonder and complaint; for in a few years, less than seventy, the Kingdom of Jesus had far outstretched the bounds of the *Roman Empire*; tho' its ruin was every where threaten'd and conspired: for the *Jews* used all their force and malice to stifle it in its birth; the Philosophers stood up with pretenses of demonstration to shew that the Doctrine of a *crucified Saviour* was *foolishness*, and that the story of *his resurrection from the dead* was absurd and impossible; the Orators were ready to exert all the artifice and power of wit and eloquence; and the Populace opposed it all they could, after their usual way, by calumnies, lies and fury. Nay, the Civil Power, after all, stepped in with its assistance, and resolved, as upon the only sure and effectual means, to cut off every offender; and to secure at least one good end of punishment, the deterring others, Death was represented to them in all its frightful shapes ^h; for Christian Criminals were to expire,

^f Matt. xxvii. 19.

^g Rev. xiv. 6.

^h Iis afficiebantur tormentis, quibus crudeliora nulla reperiri poterant; supplicia vero ad mortem tam frequentia, ut testantur illorum temporum scriptores, nullâ fame, nullâ pestilentia, nullo bello plus hominum

pire, or rather live, so long as nature or art could support them, under all the variety of exquisite pain and torture the most malicious or shrewd imagination could invent. And yet in all these tryals St. *Paul* glories, that they *were more than Conquerors*ⁱ, so that *the Kingdoms of this world became the Kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ*^k.

1. As for the causes of this victory and success, the first, which I shall mention, is this, That our religion is in itself really excellent, and exactly suitable to our nature in its most perfect state; for it furnisheth the mind with all necessary knowledge of divine things, and explains to us most clearly the nature and perfections of God, so that *all may know him from the least even to the greatest*^l, more perfectly than did the most sagacious reasoner in the days of *Pagan* darkness. The Gospel also gives us a compleat system of moral duties, and each of them there stand upon the strongest evidence, and ratified by the Authority of the Governor of the Universe, which is only proper to enact them into laws: And their observance is secured by those fit springs or sanctions of moral actions, eternal happiness and misery, which may carry our views beyond the pleasures or evils of this world, may be ever pressing upon our hopes and fears, and provoke men to every good work.

GOD'S *image* on the soul was indeed strangely defaced, and man had perverted the *uprightness* of his nature by *seeking out many inventions*; the taste and re-

minum uno tempore absumptum. Nec vulgaria erant mortium genera, sed vivicomburia cruces, atq; id genus pænæ, quæ sine maximo horrore legi, aut cogitari non possunt. Grot. de Ver. Christianæ Relig. Lib. II. cap. 22.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 37.

^k Rev. xi. 15.

^l Heb. viii. 11.

lish

lish of his mind for spiritual knowledge and good were almost changed into aversion, so that a recovery could not but be difficult. However, a state of sin, as a state of natural irregularity, must ever be attended with uneasiness, and men must feel from it a painful disorder in their minds and bodies. Reason, judgment and conscience were never without some influence, and our faculties are all so framed, as to perceive a difference between good and evil, and to reflect a pleasure from the impressions of the one, and trouble and disquiet from those of the other. Nay, truth and virtue undisguised will always command our assent and approbation, though they lay no necessity on our choice and practice. No wonder therefore that the wise and good followed after christian *godliness*, since it is *profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come* ^m.

2. B U T a *second* reason of the Gospel's success may be, that it was a *light to lighten the Gentiles*, and to disperse the dark clouds of ignorance, error and superstition. And as the latter of them fell in with the desires of sinful man to recover the favour of his God, and to make atonement for his transgressions by sacrifices, and the mediation of Beings, better than himself; so it was natural for those, who were misled by these good and religious principles, to have embraced with joy the glad tidings of grace and mercy in the gospel, the remission of sins upon repentance, an all-sufficient sacrifice, and a Mediator, whose intercessions can never fail; and to have received with transport the revealed assurances of future existence and glory, which the Soul could not but long after in order to compleat its happiness, and to make human life a wise and regular design.

^m Tim. iv. 8.

3. THIRDLY, The very way of preaching the gospel, and the character of its Preachers, must have promoted the success of it; for integrity, sincerity, and plainness, were their most distinguishing qualities. The whole story of their Master's life and doctrines, and of their own faults and failings, is told without art or disguising, and is fitted to the lowest apprehensions, by an open simplicity, that shews it comes from honest and well-meaning minds, affecting the hearts of them who hear or read it, and therefore was most likely to gain a real belief and a lasting esteem. And indeed happy was it for our religion, that the first Preachers of it used no studied ornaments of speech, or moving arts of persuasion, which often gain upon the minds of men, and steal erroneous doctrines into the undiscerning or unwary; for thus being destitute of false charms and allurements, its conquests and success must be owing to plain evidence, and the unassisted force of truth and virtue, which prevailed over the spirit of error and wickedness, of delusion and disobedience. For Christianity had indeed so wonderful an influence over the lives and manners of men, that it has been doubted, whether any motive, even miracles themselves, was more successful in the spreading it, than the exemplary piety, and uncommon virtues of its Preachers, and first Converts; for upon the change of their religion there followed a most surprising alteration in the spirit and temper of their minds; they who before *denied God in their works, being abominable and disobedient, unclean, and to every good work reprobate*, became immediately *new men, renewed in the spirit of their minds, being holy in all manner of conversation*, and as it were *created anew in righteousness and true holiness*ⁿ. And how affecting to all who saw them must

ⁿ Tit. i. 16. Eph. iv. 23. 1 Pet. i. 15.

be the light of their good works, raising every where wonder and emulation ? Their piety and virtues must have *adorned the doctrines of the Gospel*, and have looked with so amiable a countenance, as to charm and invite many to it : and have carried so much majesty and authority, as to command reverence from its greatest enemies, and make men to acknowledge, that ° *God was in them of a truth, and to glorify their Father, which was in heaven*, and his Son on earth.

4. BUT, lastly, how mighty to convince must be that ruling principle, which shone forth in an Apostle's conduct, *P we seek not yours, but you*, excited by no other motives than the love of truth, God's glory, and the good of souls. And indeed their Enemies by stripping the christian religion of all secular encouragement, and advantages, have confirmed beyond dispute, that it was free from all suspicions of worldly views, that it was not advanced or settled upon the prospect of glory and honour, nor entertained through fear or hope, interest or pleasure ; but in regard to truth, the favour of God, and the promises of another life. Even Martyrdom itself could not but raise a credit to its evidence, and prove the marvellous means of its more abundant increase ¶. For the blood of Martyrs was rather the seed of the Church, which like the *grain of mustard-seed* in the *Parable*, grew and waxed a great tree, shooting out wide and flourishing branches, so that Christians sprang up

° 1 Cor. xiv. 25. Mat. v. 16. P 2 Cor xii. 14, &c. Acts xx. 33.

¶ Grotius gives this argument its just force. Quare cum Christiana Religio hæc quoq; in parte tam in immensum cæteras excellat, merito aliis anteponenda est. Ex illâ tantâ multitudine omnis generis, sexûsq; hominum tot locis distinctorum, qui pro hæc Religione mori non dubitarunt, colligendum, magnam aliquam tantæ constantiæ fuisse causam, quæ aliæ cogitari non potest, quam lux veritatis, & Dei Spiritus. *De Verit. Christiana Relig. Lib. II. c. 22.*

faster than any Persecution could cut them down : and their death did at least awaken the curiosity and attention of every one to examine opinions, for which the vouchers should even dare to die in crowds. And upon such an examination Christianity could not but have had many Converts to it, though God had not *bore witness* to it *both with signs and wonders, and with diverse miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will*^r. And among the number of those *gifts*, I reckon the inward operation of the Spirit on the minds of men, *renewing, enlightening, and sanctifying them, filling them with all joy and peace in believing, and bringing forth the fruits of goodness, righteousness and truth*. To these Causes we may ascribe the surprising success, and universal settlement of our Faith : but how far these may be urged, as arguments for its truth, and good proofs of its divine origin and authority, I shall now consider

2. UNDER my *second* general head. And that they are such, it would be enough to produce none other than the evidence of Prophecy ; for though we should allow a knowledge less than infinite, able to discover and foretel events beyond human view, yet when such events are insisted on as Credentials from God, his goodness will be concerned to prevent their accomplishment : and He, who governs futurity, must be supposed, since men cannot, to stop the progress of an Impostor, in whom there was not wanting any one circumstance, character, or mark, which the ancient Prophets had appropriated to the promised *Messiah*. As to the speedy progress of the gospel, and the glorious increase of the Christian Church, by the conversion of the *Gentiles*, a man must be a

^r Heb. ii. 4. ^s Tit. iii. 5. 1 Cor. xii. 3. Eph. i. 17, 18.
¹ Pet. i. 2. Rom. xv. 13. Gal. v. 22.

stranger to the writings of the Prophets, who wants to be reminded of the many ^c passages, that expressly prædict these extraordinary events in the most lively figures, so that they seem rather to be written, as the history of the gospel-state, and chronicles of its success and victories, than a prophetic description of times and events to come. Thus strong is their evidence in our favour, and to which nothing need be added, except our Saviour's own prædictions in the *Parable* of my text, and in other plain passages of the *New Testament*, that *this Gospel of the Kingdom should be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and that he would build his Church upon a rock, and that the gates of hell should not prevail against it* ^u. These Prophecies must put the controversy beyond dispute, and ascertain the divine origin and power of christianity, whose spreading in so short a time was so unlikely, that as nothing but the wisdom of God could foresee it, so nothing but his power could bring it to pass.

THE ancient *Apologists* for our faith have indeed gone much farther, and urge the mere success of the gospel, as an argument of force sufficient to create a reasonable belief of it. Nor ought we, I think, to decline their assistance, though I am well aware of some objections against it. As that, success can be no measure of truth, or motive to our assent, which ought only to rely on the evidence of things, or certainty of facts. Prosperity and extent of dominion are not in the ordinary course of Providence marks of a good cause; why then of a true religion? And with how much justice may the *Pagan* and *Mahometan* retort this argument on the Christian? And thus much we must give

^c Gen. xlix. 10. Isai. xi. 10. xlix. 6. Dan. vii. 13, 14. Zech. ix. 10. Mal. i. 11.

^u Mat xxiv. 14. xvi. 18.

up, that bare success or prosperity can never change the necessary relations between truth and falsehood, good and evil ; for truth and virtue must continue the same ; though they should not prevail over error and vice. And yet the reasoning we make use of will stand the test, being founded upon this clear difference, that the prevalence of Christianity can only be imputed to its native truth and goodness, and to the miraculous assistance and blessing of Providence, whereas that of the other two religions, is owing to natural causes, human means, and to motives, which betray their falsity and corruption.

As for *Heathenism* ; no one scheme of it was universal, but every nation had Gods, and a worship of them peculiar to itself. Nor would it be impossible to trace in History the rise and progress of every species of Idolatry, superstitious rite, or erroneous opinion. Primitive or *Patriarchal* religion corrupted by degrees with human nature, till it became suited to the vicious tempers and carnal inclinations of mankind, and then soon grew into reverence through custom, or was established by Civil Power, being first made subservient to Civil policy by the management of crafty statesmen. Whereas the Philosophers, and some of the wisest and best Heathen were sensible of the folly and superstition of their publick worship, but not knowing how to remedy the evil by a perfect scheme, they comply'd by an external carriage, out of love to peace, and their own safety, though a sincere belief, and conscientious approbation were both wanting.

As to the progress of *Mahomet's* imposture, no one will be surpris'd at it, who is not a stranger to his life and *Alcoran*. For there was in his days just such a corruption of the *Christian* religion, in such times of darkness and ignorance, and by such insensible steps, as there was heretofore of *Natural* religion, when *Heathenism*

prevailed. An universal degeneracy of principles and manners, the sects and divisions of the *Greek Church*, and the bad estate of the Eastern Empire, were those sad, but favourable conjunctures of which this Impostor (*voluptuarius & armatus*) full well knew the use, and calculated his faith and morality, rewards and penalties, to the times wherein he lived, and the corruption of them. He founded a civil and religious dominion on the ruins of *Judaism* and *Christianity*, and out of the fashionable Errors of both, framed a system of doctrines, well pleasing to flesh and blood, which he planted, and his successors have maintained, not by conviction or miracles, but by worldly motives, and the power of the sword^x.

BUT how different were the methods by which the Christian Faith spread its conquests o'er the world? Its victories were the victories of reason, truth and virtue, unassisted by human power, wealth, learning, policy or eloquence. For it arose, as its Enemies allow, from mean and, in human view, despicable beginnings. Its Author and his Followers courted not by base compliances the interest of the Great, or the favour of the Populace; they resigned all worldly advantages, and flattered no re-

^x See Grotius *De verit. Relig. Christiana. Lib. vi. c. 1, 7.* Maraccius's opinions about Mahometism are also well worth your reading. *Habet hæc superstitio quicquid plausibile ac probabile in Christianâ religione reperitur, & quæ naturæ legi ac lumini consentanea videntur, & sub boni veriq; specie decipit. Mysteria illa fidei nostræ, quæ primo aspectu incredibilia & impossibilia apparent, & præcipue quæ nimis ardua humanæ naturæ, penitus excludit. Præfat. prodromi Alcorani. And again, in præfat. ad Alcorani refutationem, p. 9. Ego semper in eâ opinione fui (experientiâ id mihi, & ratione suadente) quod si Alcoranus & Evangelium gentibus illis proponatur, semper Alcoranum potius & Mahumeticam superstitionem quam Evangelium & Christianam religionem amplexuræ sint, nisi antea & de Evangelii veritate, & de Alcorani fraudibus & mendaciis probè instruantur. Primâ quippe facie ea, quæ hic habet, naturæ præsertim corruptæ dictamini magis conformia apparent, quam quæ illud proponit, &c.*

ligion, sect or party : but resolved to convert all nations, tho' devoted to some Tutelar Deities, and settled in their worship by Civil laws. Their intention to banish every sort of Idolatry was declared and open, y and no sooner were the human props of power, wealth and policy taken away, but *Heathen* superstition *fell down*, and broke to pieces, like *Dagon before the ark of God*. The *Devils* were every where *subject unto it*, and their oracles struck dumb. No sooner did *the sun of righteousness* arise, and his light break forth to the utmost corners of the earth, but the clouds of ignorance and error flew before it. The Preachers of the Gospel, mean and unlearned as they were, baffled whole Synagogues, put the Schools of Philosophers to silence, struck an awe into courts of Judicature, and made their way with triumph through all the opposition and resistance, that the lusts and prejudices of men, armed with the power and wisdom of the whole world, could make against it ^z.

FOR

^y Tum vero ingens nobis præter ea, quæ supra sunt allata, argumentum suppeditat contra se Pagana religio, eo quod ubicunq; humanâ vi destituta est, planè concidit, tanquam sublato, quo uno stabat. Grotius de Veritat. Christianæ Relig. Lib. iv. c. 10.

^z St. Chrysostom sets off this subject, as he does most others, with a beautiful eloquence peculiar to himself. See his Demonstration, ὅτι ἐστὶ Θεὸς ὁ Χριστός. And yet I cannot forbear transcribing some passages in another language, out of a book, which I once met with, and much wish it in all hands. If those who read them think of them as I do, they will readily excuse their length, and read them with pleasure, even after the eloquent Chrysostom's oration. Sic e parvo semine crevit Ecclesia Christiana in arborem, in sylvam : quæ etiamnum viget, & magnam terrarum partem obumbrat. Miremur interea vim divinam hujusce seminis, Christianæ Religionis intelligo progressum & incrementa ; quæ ab initiis exiguis urbes, regiones, imperia sibi subjugavit, non armis aut armatorum turmis, ut olim invaluerit Monarchiæ celebres, & lex Mahometis : sed a plebeiis, & piscatoribus promulgata doctrina, & per miracula cælitus confirmata, flexit in assensum & obsequium genus humanum ; renitentibus interea tam Judæis quam Gentibus, Imperatoribus diu persequentibus, & oblutante Diabolo, furiisq; infernis. And again, Vi & armis utantur aliæ sectæ, ut illa Mahometis : alienq; sanguine madefacta crescat & propagetur eorum religio, nostræ nostræ.

FOR I may add, that it is the peculiar glory of our Faith to have been revealed in an age, in which, as many think, human literature attained to perfection, and wherein it was sure to undergo the most strict scrutiny. An argument, that the cunning of men could not discover the least artifice or deceit in it, and that its success was wholly owing to its truth and goodness supported by the favour and power of God; for when Man had done his utmost, God became concerned to unravel the cheat (if there was any) and to prevent the settlement of an imposture; since the bare permission of its increase, was in such circumstances to approve and commend it to future ages, as free from every just suspicion. *Grotius* therefore rightly concludes, ^a "that if God's Providence at all concern itself in human affairs, one cannot but believe this doctrine to be divine". So that *St Paul* might well reason as in triumph, *where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? having chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty* ^b. This grain of mustard-seed in the Parable, whose growth was so prosperous and amazing, must have been watered by dews and showers of heavenly blessing, and defended from the injuries of violence by a special Providence.

nostra. Vincant Illi ut Hostes; Nos ut amici, monitores, consiliarii. Minis & metu adigant alii serviles animas in suum gregem: Nos monstratâ viâ salutis vitæq; æternæ, ut eam ingrediantur suademus, hortamur, & quodammodo propellimus; at solâ vi veritatis, & propriæ suæ Conscientiæ stimulis. De Fide & officiis Christianorum. Cap. 9. I scarce need to name the Author, the Spirit and the language will discover him to any one who has read with pleasure Dr. Burnet's Theory of the Earth in Latin.

^a Si Deo ulla est cura rerum humanarum, non possit hoc dogma non divinum credi. *De veritat. Christianæ Relig. Lib. ii. Cap. 18.*

^b 1 Cor. i. 10, 27.

BUT

BUT what is more; doth not a success by such means, and in such circumstances of difficulty, and so far beyond all human probability plainly prove, that Miracles were wrought, and that such a change could not have been effected, but by a ^cpower, whose excellency was not of men, but of God, and therefore it could not be overthrown. His Spirit must needs have given what our Saviour promised his Apostles, *a mouth and wisdom, which all their Adversaries should not be able to gainsay or resist* ^d. The Lord must have worked with them, and confirmed their words, bearing them witness both with signs and wonders, and diverse miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost ^e, particularly, the gift of speaking every language under heaven; which gift, if any, is miraculous; and without it their labours had been vain, for they could not have published the gospel with success or speed: since the learning all languages was a qualification indispensibly necessary unto them, and would have cost them more years and pains to attain it, than were spent in teaching all nations. So that to these *miracles and gifts* joined to the power of truth and virtue, the wondrous success of their preaching is to be ascrib'd; an Argument you will best perceive the force of, in the words of a late excellent *Prelate* of our Church, "Whoever believes, that Christianity could
 " make so swift and so great a progress, as it is certain by
 " all History it did, only by the preaching of the Apo-
 " stles, without any *miraculous gifts* or *supernatural*
 " *assistance*, wants not faith enough to be a christian, if
 " he had but a will to it; for he believes already a much
 " greater miracle, than any that is recorded in the *Evan-*
 " *gelical Story*" ^f. For I know no other notion of a

^c 2 Cor. iv. 7. Acts v. 39.

^e Mark xvi. 20. Heb. ii. 4.
 Serm. 5.

^d Luke xxi. 15.

^f Bishop Blackhall's Boyle's Lect.

Miracle, than a work above natural causes, and human power and comprehension; and such a one, I am sure, every one must think the sudden and universal reception the Gospel met with. *This must be the Lord's doing*, and therefore *ought to be marvellous in our eyes* §.

To this, I shall add nothing more, but a reply to some objections against the doctrine of this discourse, which take their rise and strength from the state of *Christianity* at this day. For thus the Infidel does argue: If the success of the gospel was at any time so great and surprising as we have represented it, why do not the same causes produce the same effects? Why hath not *Christianity* maintained its conquests in their full extent? Is it not strange and unaccountable, that the *Missionaries*, who are now sent from *Christian* countries, should not convert vast crowds of *Pagans*, as the *Apostles* did heretofore, or indeed have long ago baptized in the name of *Christ* the large regions of the new discovered world? If the truth and goodness of the gospel did once work a wondrous change on the minds, and manners of men, is it not improbable, that they, who now believe and profess it, should be so scandalous and wicked in their lives, and *to every good work reprobate*? The conclusion therefore of the Infidel is this, that the story of its success is an incredible and amazing Fable.

§ Nihilominus *Christiana* valuit Fides. Quâ vi? mihi dicas velim. *Divinâ* aut *Humanâ*. Obstiterunt, ut vides, *Humana* omnia. *Numen* his interfuisse negabis, summum & ineluctabile? Non minorem certe potentiam exigit, monstratq; eventus: & quæ plurima identidem intercesserunt miracula, *Deum* ostentant præsentem, & cœptis aspirantem. *De Fide & officiis Christianorum. Cap. 4.* Cum illa *Religionis Christianæ* tam diuturna continuatio, & tam latè diffusa propagatio ad nullam humanam efficaciam referri possit: sequitur, ut tribuenda sit *Miraculis*, aut si quis *Miraculis* neget id factum, hoc ipsum, quod sine miraculo tale quid tantas acceperit vires, majus habendum est omni miraculo. *Grot. de Verit. Christianæ Relig. Lib. II. cap. 22.*

MY Answer to these objections is, that the Fact itself appears upon both *Pagan* and *Sacred* records, and therefore we must discredit all historical evidence in any matter; or else we must allow, that Christianity did once make the surprising progress we have been mentioning, and that *its sound went into all the earth, and its words unto the ends of the world*^h. And for this progress no reason can be given, but the force of truth, the charms of virtue, and the power of God working with both of them by Miracles, and qualifying the preachers of it by the gift of tongues, and at last, bearing undeniable witness to it by accomplishing the Prophecies of Christ; so that the world has had a sufficient experiment of the power and efficacy of Christianity; and this ought to give a lasting credit and reputation to it, though we could not now account for its declining, and losing ground. For ⁱ *how unsearchable are God's judgments, and his ways past finding out?* ^k *Wisdom and might are his; He changeth the times and the seasons; and he ruleth in the kingdoms of men, and giveth them to whomsoever he will.* Why may it not be so with Churches? especially since our Saviour's threatening is not in the reason of it peculiar to the Jews; ^l *The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.* And should that Nation also not continue to bring forth fruits meet for such a blessing, the same sentence may in justice be pronounced on it; or there may be reason good for fulfilling *what the Spirit said unto the once flourishing Churches of Asia, Remember therefore from whence ye are fallen, and do the first works, or else I will come unto you quickly, and will remove your candlestick out of his place, except ye repent: and I will*

^h Rom. x. 18.

^k Dan. ii. 20, 21. iv. 25.

ⁱ Rom. xi. 33.

^l Matt. xxi. 43.

give unto every one of you according to your works^m.

And accordingly their *Candlestick* hath been long ago removed, and they have been given up to darkness and their own inventions, a prey to slavery and *Mahometism*. So likewise it hath happened to the Churches of *Africa*: And in *Europe*, according to the Prophecy of St. Paul, ⁿ many have departed from the faith, giving heed to seducing Spirits, and to the Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness^o. Nay, except we repent, we may all likewise perish, being abandoned to ignorance, delusion and misery.

As to the spreading of our religion in *Heathen* Countries, it will appear from the nature of the thing that Conversions must be slow, since their Inhabitants are entire strangers to those plans and schemes of Providence; which we learn from *Moses* and the *Prophets*, to have been carrying on from the fall of *Adam*, and in them discover so uniform and wise a connexion of events, that we are certain to a demonstration, that all the designs and promises of God to man have had a perpetual view and regard to *Christ*, and were to receive their final accomplishment in Him, whose *Dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his Kingdom, that which shall not be destroyed*^p. But besides this ignorance of *Sacred History* in the Hearers of the Gospel, the Preachers of it now want that immediate and sensible demonstration of Divine Authority, which the *Apostles* gave by working Miracles. We

^m Rev. ii. 5, 23.

^o Luke xiii. 5.

ⁿ 1 Tim. iv. 1. 2 Thess. ii. 3, &c.

^p Dan. vii. 14.

are not therefore to expect numerous Profelytes on a sudden to the Christian Faith, until God shall in his wise, appointed time furnish out again a new mission of *Apostles*, with a measure of those extraordinary Gifts, which he poured out on the day of *Pentecost*, particularly the Gift of Tongues ; though there is reason to believe, that our Religion would even now make larger conquests, was it as pure as in the early ages, and thus preached, as of *sincerity, and in the sight of God*, † without worldly views, entirely free from any mixtures of superstition and error, from the customs and inventions of men, and never forced upon them, by the barbarous cruelties of a persecuting Spirit. And if it does not make so large a progress, when preached in its native purity ; the consequence is clear, that Miracles are also necessary to the spreading of it again, and that they were wrought in the early ages of the gospel, *when the Kingdoms of this world became the Kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ.*

As to the little influence Christianity hath at present on the minds and manners of its Professors, the objection is no less true against the principles of reason, because men do not act and live accordingly. The blame ought not to fall upon the doctrines of the gospel, but

† Bishop Fleetwood does, I fear, too truly describe the modern principles and views of some Christian Missionaries, in his Sermon before the King, Nov. 5. 1700. I seek not yours, but you, saith St. Paul to the Corinthians. But there are Missionaries of another Mind, that seek not Souls, but Gain, or Men for their estates sake. Look well about, what sort of Countries these great Zealots chuse for Conquests ; if it be Tyre, or Sidon, or Damascus, rich and trading Cities ; or some obscure and poor, though populous inland places. See if the Glory of God, and good of Souls make so much noise in the cold and barren North, as they do in warmer, richer Climates, where Men reward as well as God ; and yet where Souls are full as valuable and dear to Him, as in the Land of Havilah, where is Gold, and Bdellium, and the Onyx-stone.

upon the Persons, *by whom these offences come*, and who have it in their power to be as good and *wise unto salvation*, as Christians ever were. They are not indeed now to have every article of faith enforced upon them by *signs and wonders*; they are not to be called upon by *Prophets*, raised up on purpose to remind them of their duty, or to be assisted in it by extraordinary communications of Grace. It is enough that they have a standing ministry of *Preachers*, to instruct, to exhort, and to reprove them; they must themselves search History and Scripture, the writings of *Moses, the Prophets and Evangelists*, for evidence of their faith and duty, and then imprint upon their minds by mature consideration all the arguments and motives they find in them; that thus they may live under the influences of conviction, and act with the assisting grace of God, as they believe and know they ought. But the misfortune is, that many people do not hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Holy Scriptures, nor are they *ready to give a reason of the hope that is in them*. They take up their religion as a fashion, and lay it down again, as it grows out of date. They are born in a country where it is settled, and therefore they are of it. Had Providence but changed the climate of their birth, they would with equal reason have been *Heathens* or *Mahometans*. What wonder is it then, or what real reproach ought it to be unto Christianity, that they should live as *Heathens* or *Mahometans*, since their Principles are no wit better? besides, the credit and worldly advantages of a Christian faith, do now make many Hypocrites, who have no reason for their profession but their interest, which often suffers little by a wicked life.

NOTHING

NOTHING now remains but one short inference. Since our vices and impieties ^a do give occasion to these censures and reflections on *Christianity*, calling into question the very truth of it, and branding the *Son of God*, and our *Redeemer*, with the odious names of Deceiver and Impostor. This consideration ought most deeply to affect us with remorse, and awaken us to repentance ; I am sure the *Apostle* speaks of it with great concern, *many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ ; whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame ; who mind earthly things ;* whereas our *Conversation* ought to be *in heaven*^r. And can there be a more just upbraiding, or a greater aggravation of our guilt, than that the religion, which when persecuted was so powerful on those whose minds were prejudiced, and whose manners were depraved by the principles of idolatry and

^a Reland will inform us, how strange a Character we Christians and our Religion, on our account, have in Turkey ; nor have we, or THAT, I fear, a better in the Eastern and Western Indies. *Hodie vero Nostri id agunt, ut vitâ & moribus suis videantur conspirasse ad avertendos Turcarum animos a fide Christianâ. Fraudes homine Christiano indignæ, vita dissoluta, mores pravi, consortia turpissima, mendacia quibus ob leve lucrum sæpissime aliis imponunt, proverbium dedere Turcis, quod æterno nobis erit opprobrium, nisi novis moribus facta priora deleamus. Si quis Turca Constantinopoli Turcæ aliquid affirmet, narretve, & alter rege- rat Itane ? An hoc fieri potest ? An res ita se habet, uti dicis ? Statim illum respondentem, cum indignatione audies, Putasne me Christianum esse ? Pudeat profecto*

Hæc dici potuisse, & non potuisse refelli.

Sane quum animo recolo, quam parum convenienter sanctissimis nostræ religionis institutis vivamus, Nos qui gloriamur nobis lumen Evangelii a Deo esse porrectum, præ tot aliis gentibus (quarum virtutes & bona opera ne nomen quidam illud mereri solemus dicere) mirari subit illam tantum non universalem mentium cæcitatem & corruptionem, &c. De Religione Mohammedicâ Præfat. Cap. 9.

[Phil. iii. 18, &c.

super-

superstition, should yet have so little influence on most of us, who live in peace, and *have from our childhood known the holy scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto salvation, and thoroughly furnished unto all good works, through faith which is in Christ Jesus*?

IF these therefore be the present Circumstances of Christianity, Let us, *my Brethren of the Clergy*, be sure to preach the gospel as pure and perfect as we find it in the Holy Scriptures, never *corrupting the word of God*, or trafficking with invented doctrines for the riches, pleasures, honours or dominion of this world: but let us always *speak as of sincerity, and in the sight of God*, being influenced by no other motives, than his glory, the love of truth, and the good of souls. And above all, let us go before our flocks in the paths of virtue that we shew them, setting off every christian grace with that engaging lustre our examples will not fail to give it. For if a sober, unblemished and exemplary life do not adorn our ministry and doctrines, experience tells us, that our preaching and our labours are to little purpose, nay, quite thrown away among the generality of people, who have not either honesty or discretion enough to separate the goodness of our religion from the badness of our lives. How much therefore it concerns even the interests of the gospel for *us* to be good, I cannot better inform you, than by a wise reflection of the late judicious Bishop *Fleetwood*. “With how much reason
“and strength soever, says he, ‘I think I could argue
“against those men, who slight and discredit virtue and
“religion for the wickedness sake of some bad Mini-
“sters: Yet does my heart fail me when I consider how
“it is in *fact*, and to what degree these good things

* 2Tim. iii. 15, 17.
of St. Asaph, 1710. P. 15.

† In his Charge to the Clergy of the Diocese

“ suffer in the world from any of our notorious fail-
 “ ings. Then have I little joy in thinking, that men
 “ make false conclusions in these cases, when I remem-
 “ ber they *have* made, and *will* to the end of the world
 “ make just the *same* conclusions. Then have I little
 “ regard to all that can be offered to these gainsayers of
 “ the truth, and rather turn my self to you, *my Bre-*
 “ *thren of the Clergy* with the most serious exhortation
 “ of St. Paul to Titus,^u that you would in *all things*
 “ *shew your selves Patterns of good works, that he that*
 “ *is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no*
 “ *evil thing to say of you:* and ^x *giving no offence in*
 “ *any thing, that the Ministry, or the Gospel, be not*
 “ *blamed; being blameless and harmless, the sons of*
 “ *God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and*
 “ *perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the*
 “ *world, holding forth the word of life* ^y.

BUT as the latter part of this Exhortation concerns
 us all; Let all of us *my Brethren*, whether of the Clergy
 or the *Laity*; and I intreat you, that we may, *in the*
name of Christ, and for the sake of our religion, ^z *de-*
part from all iniquity, that the name of God and Christ
be not blasphemed among the Gentiles through us ^a. Let
 our actions be ever agreeable to our profession; and let
 us excell others as much in our virtues, as our Religion
 doth theirs in purity and holiness, in motives, assistances
 and rewards. Let us thus remove one main obstacle to
 the progress of the Gospel, and recommend it to the
 world by unblameable and exemplary lives, that we may
 give glory unto God, do honour to our Master and Re-
 deemer, save our own souls, and silence, if not convert
 our Enemies, *that they seeing our good works may glorify*

^u Tit. ii. 7.

^x 2 Cor. vi. 3.

^y Phil. ii. 15.

^z 2 Tim. ii. 19.

^a Rom. ii. 24.

our Father, which is in Heaven, and believe in him, whom he hath sent, even his Son Christ Jesus.

To whom with the Holy Ghost, three persons, but one God, be blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour for ever and ever. Amen.

F I N I S.



